

Are You Ready For Winter? Ron Dodson, KA4MAP

As we are quite probably in the last gasps of our "good weather" days before the winter settles in, this is a good time to assess your equipment, its condition and any needs you might have. Let's will review some hints on effective equipment preparedness.

First your home station... Are your antennas in good condition? Are all guy wires and electrical connections sound? Do any tree branches that need removal before a winter storm brings them crashing down on your best antenna? Do you have spare wire, feedline and connectors so that you could use to throw up a quick replacement if something did go wrong? How about your back up power supply? Are your batteries or generator in need of maintenance before they might be pressed into service? Do you have a family disaster preparedness kit ready to go with enough non-perishable food, water, heat sources, etc. to get you through a long spell of the harsh conditions winter often brings to us?

How about your vehicles? Do they need new tires, battery, etc? Maintenance now can save a world of grief at fifteen or twenty below zero. Are your mobile antennas and electrical connections in good condition? Do you have a mini disaster kit in your car? It may seem unimportant now, but that box of tools, jumper cables, a blanket, flashlight and some non-perishable food etc. could be real nice if you became stuck overnight in unfamiliar territory in a big snow or ice storm.

One more word on this; ten to twenty inch snowfalls can make your own backyard "unfamiliar territory". Many people have died in winter storms when they became disoriented in heavy snows even when close to home in areas they traveled daily.

Now let's look at your portable gear... How are you fixed for spare batteries? Make sure ahead of time that you have good spare batteries for your HT. If you have multiple radios, they EACH need spare batteries. Many universal chargers are available now, which can quick charge ALL your batteries even while you are mobile. You might consider one of these as a future addition to your equipment if you don't already have one.

A higher gain HT antenna is also very handy. There are several HT antennas that work much better than the small "rubber duck" that comes with the HT. The five-eighths wave and half-wave telescoping antennas, when fully extended, give the most improvement. When they are collapsed they work about as well as a rubber duck (but they are somewhat longer, and are more fragile). A shortened half-wave antenna (about 12 inches long on 2 meters) is a useful compromise, being about as efficient as a full-length quarter wave antenna.

Many amateur dealers and home and auto supply stores have sales about this time of the year and now is a good time to check pricing on any gear or accessories you may need to build up your home, car and radio equipment so you will be ready when old man winter reaches your door. Christmas will soon be here and if you drop a few hints, maybe some of your equipment shortfalls might even wind up under your tree.